DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 857 SO 023 810

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TITLE Aesthetic Preference for Human Figures.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aesthetic Values; *Art Education; *Art History; Attitude Measures; *Design Preferences; Higher Education; Social Science Research; *Student Attitudes; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Discipline Based Art Education; *Salkind Art Preference Test

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This study reports descriptive and correlational data relative to the aesthetic preferences for the human figure on the Salkind Art Preference Test (SAPT). The study is an example of the descriptive aesthetic method in which methods, descriptive statistics, and factor analysis are employed to explore the relationships among specific works of art as measured by the aesthetic preferences of the college undergraduate student in history of design survey course. The most consistent pattern of preference was a negative correlation for a highly complex Duchamp painting with the more representational slides used in the Salkind Art Test. The patterns of preference obtained in the data are discussed in terms of the objective characteristics of the works of art themselves. Implications of this research are reported for the teaching of design history and for problems of assessment of discipline based art education (DBAE). The descriptive method can be used to explore preference relationships among specific works of art. The document includes seven tables. (Author/SG)

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ED 370 857

AESTHETIC PREFERENCE FOR HUMAN FIGURES

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Fall 1990

SO 023 810

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ABSTRACT

This study reports descriptive and corrrelational data relative to the aesthetic preferences for the human figure on the Salkind Art Preference Test. (SAPT) The study is an example of the descriptive aesthetic method in which methods, descriptive statistics, and factor analysis are employed to explore the relationships among specific works of art as measured by the aesthetic preferences of the college undergraduate student in history of design survey course. The most consistent pattern of perference was a negative correlation for a highly complex Duchamp painting with the more representational slides used in the Salkind Art Test. The patterns of preference obtained in the data are discussed in terms of the objective characteristics of the works of art themselves. Implications of this research are reported for the teaching of design history and for problems of assessment of discipline based art education, DBAE. The descriptive method can be used to explore preference relationships among specific works of art.

Background and Review of Literature

The current interest in discipline based art education (DBAE) and its' focus upon the four disciplines for the teaching of art: art studio, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics has stimulated new interest in the measurement of aesthetic preference. While each of the four component disciplines of DBAE have their own validated assessment strategies and methodologies, the combination of the four domains into a unified curriculum based upon the broad content of art seems to require, in this writer's judgement at least, the development of assessment methods that are somewhat unique or at least congruent with the basic thrust of such a unified curriculum. (Getty, 1990)

Art education history has demonstrated that when there is a renewal of interest in talking about and looking at art, there seems to be a renewal of interest in the question of the assessment of aesthetic preference, aesthetic judgement, and aesthetic emotion. (Barnes, 1924)

In the late 1920's a movement within American art education called "The Picture Study Movement" was also concerned with the teaching about art; in their case, the teaching of moral values and lessons from the works of the masters. (McWhinnie, 1988) This general curriculum movement within art education stimulated the first major series of psychological studies in aesthetic preference. Thomas Munro (Munro, 1928) set the frame of reference for a more scientific approach to questions of aesthetics. In his book, in his museum education program at The Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as, in the pages of The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism which he founded and edited; his efforts featured the development of research in aesthetic preference, in questions of aesthetic measure. Norman Meier (Meier, 1942) in the 1930's and the 1940's pioneered in a rather impressive program of aesthetic measure studies at the University of Iowa.

As art education research turned its' attentions more towards the developmental studies of Children's drawings (Lowenfeld, 1942); studies in aesthetic preference remained the basic providence of the psychologist. It was not until the creativity movement of the 1960's with the work of Frank Barron (Barron, 1963) that the focus once more turned to questions of empirical aesthetics. (McWhinnie, 1965) In the twenty years that have passed since this researcher first wrote on this general topic, there have been significant advances in the field of empirical aesthetics; advances which unfortunately moved the study of aesthetic preference away from art education and more into perceptual and cognitive psychology. (McWhinnie, 1985)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of the descriptive aesthetic method to present some of the parameters of aesthetic preference of the young adult student. This specific age level was selected in an attempt to connect to the early studies by Norman Meier which had also employed the undergraduate college student as subject as subject.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Are there distinct patterns in the aesthetic preferences of the young adult when given the Salkind Art Preference Test? Can those patterns of preference relate to current and accepted catagories of art history, artistic style, and aesthetic qualities?

Some of the limitations of the present series of studies were as follows:

(a) findings can really be only generalized to a young adult population.

(b) findings indicate only the general components of preference for painting which may constitute preference.

(c) casual factors relative to preference could not be considered in the statistical procedures employed.

METHOD

Seventy-one undergraduate students in a design history class took the Salkind Art Preference Test in the fall of 1987 as a part of a lecture course. The Salkind test consists of forty slides of paintings grouped according to artistic subject matter catagories and ranked from realistic to abstract. Only examples of Western European Art of the past two centuries were employed as slide items. All the slides were in color, and most of the works were from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. One minute of viewing time was allowed for each slide and the subjects recorded their preferences on a five point Likert type scale on standard machine scorable test answer sheets.

TABLE ONE

Descriptive Data for Art Test

Salkind Art Test Fall 1987 Sample

variable	mean	sd
Siefiet	3.32	0.84
Hicks	2.88	1.06
Beardon	3.45	1.05
Valminick	2.35	1.26
Hopper	3.40	0.93
Feinniger	3.43	1.11
West	3.22	1.01
Copley	3.22	0.82
Monet	3.77	1.00
Leger	3.39	1.03
Beardon	2.63	1.20
Duchamp	2.76	1.22
Louis	2.50	1.26
Rothko	2.83	1.17
Duffy	1.87	0.94
Constable	2.36	0.88
Hicks	3.66	1.01
Gauguin	3.14	0.85
Kandinsky	3.31	1.00
Field	2.38	0.96
Chardin	2.80	0.95
Peale	3.04	0.91
Harnnett	3.43	0.93
Matisse	2.60	1.02
Picasso	2.60	0.92
Braque	2.95	0.97
Dine	2.74	1.07
Lichtenstein	2.40	0.99
Courbet	2.51	1.23
Peale	3.12	0.87
Stella	3.47	1.02
De Kooning	3.26	1.01
Picasso	2.43	1.02
Matisse	2.73	0.98
Bellows	2.69	.093
Morse	3.73	1.01
Van Gogh	3.30	1.04
Stella	3.11	1.01

n = 71

The data was analysed by SPSSX statistical programs. Frequencies and other descriptive statistics were used to describe patterns of preference found and these results were compared with the data from a study done in the spring of 1987 with a comparative group of subjects. Other aspects of the general data analysis, not reported in this paper, involved the use of correlational techniques and factor analysis procedures.

The original thirty item Salkind Art Test was developed for use with groups of children and was found to be reliable for those general factors of preference assessed in this and other studies. (Salkind, 1973) The test was expanded to 40 slides divided into the catagories of:

figure

portraits

still life

landscape

figure and landscape

Slides in two catagories of the above were arranged in random order and those in three catagories were arranged in order from realistic to abstract.

RESULTS

The general patterns of aesthetic preference obtained in the fall 1987 sample reflected those patterns observed in previous studies. The descriptive data for the most preferred and least preferred from the two test samples reported below show that while the pattern may be similar, preferences for individual works between the sample have considerable variance.

TABLE TWO

Salkind Art Test Correlational Analysis Figures

	Feinniger	Frag	West	Copley	Monet	Leger	Bear	Duchamp
Feinniger			.28 ***	.21 *	.21 *			
Fragnard							.23 *	.27 **
West	.28 ***			.63 ***	.61 ***	.21 *		-.24 **
Copley	.21 *		.62 ***		.38 ***	.23 *		-.24 **
Monet	.21 *		.61 ***	.38 ***		.26 **	-.21 *	-.20 *
Leger		.23 *	.26 **					.23 *
Beardon		.23 *		-.21 *				.47 ***
Duchamp		.27 **	-.32 **	-.24 **	-.20 **	.23 *	.47 ***	

significant at

* = .05

** = .01

*** = .001

Table Three

Comparative Analysis of Two Data Sets

Fall 1987 Most Preferred Works	mean	sd	(sp 87)	Spring 1987 Most Preferred Works	mean	sd	(fall 87)
Monet	3.77	1.00	3.39	Copley	3.71	1.00	3.21
Morse	3.73	1.01	3.30	Cassatt	3.73	1.01	2.69
Fragnard	3.67	1.11	3.22	Constable	3.66	1.01	2.39
Hicks	3.66	1.01	3.14	Peale	3.47	1.02	3.12

Least Preferred works	mean	sd	(sp 87)	Least Preferred Works	mean	sd	(fall 87)
Duffy	3.77	.94	2.36	Rothko	1.87	.94	2.83
Constable	2.36	.88	3.66	Beardon	2.35	1.05	3.45
Field	2.38	.96	2.80	Kandinsky	2.38	.96	3.31
Lichtenstein	2.40	.99	2.91	Dine	2.40	.99	2.74
Louis	2.50	1.26	2.83	Dekonning	2.43	1.02	3.26

When one considers the comparative data for the fall and spring samples one can see one of the problems with aesthetic preference studies. No single work either most or least preferred is repeated or cross referenced in the above data listings. Is there a pattern in these two data sets? If we look at the fall data, the means for the spring are consistently below the fall means for the most preferred items. The least preferred works the spring 1987 means are consistently above the fall 1987 means for the same slide items. One cannot really discern any pattern of preference in this data, unless of course one might wish to consider the lack of a pattern, a pattern of preference in itself.

While the numbers don't match, there are however several distinct patterns of choice which do in fact replicate other studies with this test instrument. There is a consistent pattern of preference for the more representational and figurative works and a rejection of abstraction in landscape. This observation does seem to hold in both sets of data collected during the 1987 school year.

Table Four

Sum Scores for Two Data Sets

	Fall 1987 sample		Spring 1987 sample	
variable	mean	sd	mean	sd
Sum 1	15.42	2.28	18.85	2.42
Sum 2	26.12	3.86	25.59	4.05
Sum 3	22.46	3.98	22.36	3.59
Sum 4	22.64	4.01	22.76	4.49
Sum 5	30.70	5.55	30.32	5.38
Sum T	117.36	15.10	119.90	15.48
Sum T 1	27.80	4.25	32.02	5.25
Sum T 2	14.32	3.54	14.23	3.38

Sum one	figures and landscape (six slides)
Sum two	figures (eight slides)
Sum three	landscape (eight slides)
Sum four	still life (eight slides)
Sum five	portraits (ten slides)
Sum T	all items
Sum T_1	Realistic items
Sum T_2	Abstract items

The summed data tell the preference story more fully then does the data for individual test items. There is really no difference in the preference ratings for the catagories between our two test samples. Preference for the most realistic item in each catagory (sum t 1) is consistently higher then the preferences for the most abstract items in each slide sequence (sum t 2). The preference rating for the landscape catagory (sum 3) and the still life catagory (sum 4) are consistently lower then the other three subject matter catagories (adjusting for a number of items) and this finding is quite consistent with similar test data from our other studies of preference. The portrait catagory is the most preferred.

Unfortunately each of the slide catagories are not equal, the lower mean for catagory one can be explained by the fact it has fewer slides and catagory five has the most slides. If the numbers of items are held constant, the three slide catagories containing human figurative content are the more preferred to those two catagories, the pure landscape and the still life which do not have any human referents.

PART TWO

Descriptive Aesthetic Study

The descriptive statistical data which follows attempts to relate the assessment of aesthetic preferences to artistic style and to aesthetic qualities. How does the observed preference patterns presented in part one of this result section relate to general artistic characteristics in each of the works of art.

Preferences for Figures

Salkind Art Test Date = Spring 1987

Fragnard

This painting by the 18th century French painter Fragnard has always been one of the most prefered works on the SAPT. It is one of the more representational items and long has several as a standard by which to judge other items.

MEAN	3.22	SP	1.01	22% negative rating
KURTOIS	-.38			39% neutrual category
				38% positive category

Benjamin West:

Early 19th century American romantic painting. Highly realistic but in a romantic tradition.

The curve is normal, with low skewness and variance.
64% of the variance is with negative or neutral which indicates the general trend towards the early romantic style of the 19th century.

MEAN	3.21	SP	0.82	19% negative rating
KURTOIS	-.49			45% neutrual category
				35% positive category

William Copley:

"Jonah and the Whale"

An early American highly romantic work which has in previous studies measured some of the view sex differences in our studies.

MEAN	3.77	SP	1.00	11% negative rating
				21% neutrual category
				67% positive category

This was the most preferenced work in the figure studies preferred of 66% of the subjects. The Copley and West works are very similar in artistic style so it would seem that preference ratings are made on the basis of the subject matter.

Monet

19th century French Impressionist work.

The curve while normal is skewed towards more positive pole. 47% of the scores were positive.

MEAN	3.39	SP	1.03	48%	negative rating
KURTOIS	-.32			33%	neutrual category
				19%	positive category

Leger

A highly abstract work of the 20th century Painter Leger.
In the cubistic style of the early 1920's.

The least preferred work in the figure shows 43% were negative. The data becomes somewhat skewed towards the negative pole. A total of 76% was either negative or neutral.

MEAN	2.64	SP	1.20	N	71
KURTOIS	-.83				
				24%	negative rating
				32%	neutrual category
				44%	positive category

Beardon

A very abstract painting by 20th century American Romane Beardon. Some indications of figures still present in work but major emphasis on color and abstract design qualities.

As with the Leger, this slide was rated negative or neutral by 70% of the sample.

MEAN	2.76	SP	1.22		
KURTOIS	-.97				
				30%	negative rating
				31%	neutrual category
				40%	positive category

Duchamp

An example of his early artistic style in a work of 1910; abstract but uses clearly defined styles and colors. Highly structured and not spontaneous in effect.

The ratings tend to be negative. 60% either neutral or negative.

MEAN	2.90	STD DEV	1.26	N	71
KURTOIS	-1.11				
				39%	negative rating
				25%	neutrual category
				35%	positive category

Feinniger

Early 20th century European artistic painter. A rather dark and dramatic landscape in early cubistic style about 1910.

The most preferred work in the entire landscape sequence. Normal curve with some skewness towards more posititive end.

MEAN	3.67	SD	1.11	N	71
KURTOIS	0.01				

Morris Louis

Non-objective abstract painting by the 20th century Washington artist Morris Louis.

70% of the responses were either neutral or negative.

MEAN	2.83	SP	1.17	N	71
KURTOIS	-.79				

29% negative rating
29% neutrual category
42% positive category

TABLE THREE

Preferences for Figures

variable	sum of scores
Fragnard	229
West	228
Copley	260
Monet	241
Leger	188
Beardon	196
Duchamp	206
Feinniger	261
Louis	201

It is not only preference for human figurative content but also for how that content is treated in the work which seems to be a factor in preference. The work by Leger while it does have recognizable figures they are portrayed in a mechanistic and cubistic style. The works by Beardon and Louis are very abstract and the figurative content is barely perceptible. The ratings of the Beardon seem to be on the basis of a rejection of a spontaneous, abstract expressionistic style and the low rating in our data was consistent with other studies.

Of the more abstract works, the one by Feinniger was rated very high, while the figurative content is barely perceptual, the painting is well organized, somewhat symmetrical and controlled in execution. It is quite opposite in aesthetic qualities to the Beardon. It is interesting to contrast the Feinniger with the other highly preferred work, the 19th century romantic painting by Copley which treats the theme of Jona and the Whale. One cannot just say that the most representational works are always to be preferred over the more abstract ones. It is also a question as to how the paintings are organized as well as how they are painted. Neither the Copley nor the Feinniger are particularily colorful works so the variable of color does not seem to govern preference with this sample. The most colorful works, those by Louis, Leger, Beardon, and West were the more rejected.

The most representational work, the painting by the 18th century French artist Fragnard comes at about the mid point of the range of our scale. If our data can say anything about preference in this catagory of figurative subject matter, it would seem that the slide items with more composition and order and those with more emotional narrative content are preferred over those with a lack of order and a mechanistic approach to the figure.

CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with findings in other studies, the data once more shows the rather distinct pattern of aesthetic preference for the more representational items in those subject matter catagories which contain some figurative content. What may govern these preferences choices is the principle of empathy. That is, in general the human responds to his own humaness in preferences of works of art which have the human figure in terms of representational qualities. This was shown in the data in the low rating for the Leger, a work while having distinct figures, has them treated in what may seem to most viewers a rather mechanical manner. Empathy in this instance would probably engender emotions in reaction to such protrayals. This observation does not necessarily mean however that the most representational works shall always be preferred (lower rating for the Fragnard) but what it does seem to mean is that the most abstract as well as the more spontaneous and disorganized will be rejected.

This study conceived of preference not so much in terms of knowledge or in perceptual skills but in terms of the more fundamental, at least from a psychological point of view, of the principle of empathy. No attempt was made to asses the consequences of instruction or of change agents as the purpose was to describe the initial preference trends of the young college adult. This study demonstrated that the descriptive aesthetic method has some utility for the study of aesthetic preference at some rather basic level, and that the pattern of preference rather then the ratings for individual works can produce valid data. The basic dynamics of preference within each group will be different as will most preferred and the least preferred works, but the pattern will remain constant and the test means while they shall differ from group to group will be compatable from test sample to test sample, again if one considers the basic pattern of the scores.

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CH_SO023810

PDAT_Fall90

LEVEL_1

AUTH_McWhinnie, H.J.

TITLE_Aesthetic Preference for Human Figures.

PUBTYPE_143; 120

AUD_Researchers

GEO_U.S.; Maryland

DESC_Higher Education; *Art Education; Social Science Reearch; *Undergraduate Students; *Student Attitudes; Attitude Measures; *Art History; *Design Preferences; Aesthetic Values

IDEN_*Salkind Art Preference Tests; *Discipline Based Art Education

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